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Reagan Censorship Pact Remains Unsigned by Most Government Officials

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 15 — In March, expressing "grave concern" about disclosure of Government secrets, President Reagan signed an order requiring more than 128,000 Government employees to agree to lifelong censorship.

But Reagan Administration officials acknowledge that not one top Reagan official and only a handful of people in lower ranks have yet signed the new censorship agreement, which was issued in August.

The officials said the process had been slowed not only by ordinary bureaucratic delays but also by a need to move cautiously in light of criticism of the agreement, which prompted Congress to put a moratorium on its use, effective Nov. 22, until April 15.

Senator Charles McC. Mathias Jr., Republican of Maryland, added a provision blocking the program to a bill authorizing funds for the State Department.

Mathias Plans Hearings

The Mathias rider, which applies to the entire Government, was adopted in a rebuff to Mr. Reagan by a vote of 56 to 34 in the Senate as well as in the House.

Mr. Mathias says he will hold hearings to see if there is any need for such sweeping censorship. Other members of Congress have said they hope to block the censorship program permanently.

Other officials, however, said that the censorship program was widely resisted inside the Government. They said top officials had not hastened to sign the pact themselves before Congress acted.

Some Concession Is Indicated

A senior official strongly hinted this week that the Administration might be willing to narrow the category of information that would have to be submitted by former officials to Government censors, or otherwise alter the censorship program, in order to reach a compromise. His statement came in response to a question from a reporter about how the Administration planned to respond to the strong Congressional opposition to the censorship program.

Not one White House, Defense Department or Treasury Department official has signed the agreement, official spokesmen said. Mr. Reagan himself,

as an elected official, is exempted from signing, along with Vice President Bush, and Mr. Reagan has not volunteered to sign.

Officials of the State, Justice and Energy departments said they knew of no high official and of only a few lower officials who had signed.

Deal With Congress Sought

The order covers Government employees who handle certain materials involving intelligence sources and methods be required to sign agreements providing for "prepublication review" of their writing by official censors to be sure Government secrets are deleted from the material. The order also provided vastly expanded tests by polygraph, or lie-detector, in investigating such disclosures.

While virtually all modern Presidents have complained about "leaks," this Administration's remedies were the most drastic yet proposed.

The order set no deadline to sign the expanded censorship agreement, the language of which was made public Aug. 25.

Officials of the State and Justice departments and other departments said in interviews that before the Congressional moratorium, signatures had been required of only a few officials who were newly hired or were getting special security clearances for the first time.

This approach effectively exempted incumbent officials, including virtually all top Reagan appointees in the affected departments. They had already obtained special security clearance by signing narrower secrecy agreements used previously.

Richard K. Willard of the Justice Department, the chief architect of the censorship program, said in an interview that all incumbent officials would eventually have to sign. Officials in various agencies expressed considerable confusion about that.

The Defense Department had been

seeking permission from the National Security Council to use the new pacts only "prospectively," according to a Pentagon official involved in the program. Willard DePree, the State Department's director of management operations, said that "we were going to explore" doing the same.

As a reason for using the prospective approach, these officials said it was an administrative burden to require thousands of employees to sign new forms. Another official involved in deliberations over the program said it was widely resisted in the Government and a bureaucratic battle over carrying out Mr. Reagan's order had gone on for months. "Everybody's just dancing now, saying we aren't going to do it unless somebody makes us do it," he said.

Government employees and contract employees who handle highly classified secrets involving intelligence sources and methods, or sensitive compartmented information, would be required to sign censorship agreements. Such information is "compartmented" in that it is shown only to officials who need to see it.

Virtually all high-level officials dealing with national security and foreign policy routinely handle such data. They and other signers would have to consent to official censorship of any writing relating to intelligence matters for

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